

ALEX WOOD

STATE REPRESENTATIVE

3RD DISTRICT



2002: A CRUCIAL SESSION

Dear Friends:

When the Legislature finally adjourned last July, most everyone assumed the 2002 legislative session would be about transportation, transportation, and more transportation.

America was at peace. We had some problems with the state economy – as those of us here in the 3rd district know all too well – but still, no one was talking seriously about a national recession. Unemployment was rising, particularly in certain industries and certain areas of the state, but it was nothing like today, when Washington's joblessness rate is at or near the top in the United States.

All this changed, of course, because of September 11. The immediate effects of that day's sneak attacks on America were massive: thousands killed in New York, Virginia and Pennsylvania, property destruction in the billions, and a profound national sense of shock and grief and outrage.

But that was just the beginning. In the aftermath of the attacks, we're continuing to see more and more damage. Industries suffer; family wage jobs disappear; spending decreases, which threatens local communities and reduces state revenues. And Washington, like most states, is suddenly facing budget deficits that no reasonable person could have predicted.

So here we are as we head into this short, 60-day session: a truckload of problems and not much time. Where to cut the budget, where to leave it alone. How to stimulate the economy and help create some family wage jobs. How to make our communities more safe and secure. How to keep our schools on the right track. And don't forget, the transportation crisis is still there, growing worse every day.

Short legislative sessions like the one we're now in are usually pretty quiet. We'd ordinarily make any necessary mid-course budget corrections, and deal with one or two major issues, such as transportation, and that's about all there's time for. But this isn't going to be an ordinary session. I can't remember a session with this many critical situations to address.

I've put together this "session-at-a-glance" newsletter, a sort of outline of what we'll be looking at in Olympia. In the spring, when the Legislature has adjourned, I'll send you a report on how things went. In the meantime, I hope you'll keep in touch. Maybe more than ever, I need your advice, suggestions and input to help me do the best job I can as your representative.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Alex Wood". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping "A" and "W".

Alex Wood

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WHAT HAPPENED TO THE OPERATING BUDGET?

Washington is facing its worst state budget outlook since the early 1990s. Estimates vary, but it's safe to say we're facing a budget deficit of about \$1.2 billion (out of a budget total of \$22.8 billion). That means budget cuts are inevitable, but after several years of tax cuts and budget trimming, there are no easy choices left; heart-wrenching decisions have to be made.

I'm happy to see that Gov. Locke's budget proposal at least tries to shield the most vulnerable families from harm, but even with the best of intentions, it would require \$235 million in cuts to social services, including family services that will impact drug-affected babies, abused children, and the medically indigent. These aren't statistics. These are real people. I'm as much a realist as anyone, and I know cuts will come. But I don't welcome them, and as the session progresses, I will continue to fight for the essential needs of Washington families.

GETTING WASHINGTON MOVING AGAIN

A solution to our state's transportation crisis was the biggest piece of unfinished business when the 2001 session adjourned last year. As bad as things were then, they're now starting to look like the good old days. Traffic is worse, there's a gaping hole in the state budget, and the folks who want to milk this crisis for political gain seem oblivious to the fact that congestion costs everyone in the state hundreds of dollars each every year – not to mention the billions of dollars in lost productivity skimmed right off the top of our state's economy.

The governor has unveiled a transportation plan to address our traffic congestion – a plan that is almost identical to the one that was essentially agreed to last summer, before House Republican negotiators were overruled by their party leaders. My prediction now is that something resembling this plan will pass in the Legislature this session, contingent on approval by voters across the state.

In the meantime, as a member of the House Transportation Committee, I'll keep working for additional efficiencies in the way we spend our transportation dollars. This certainly isn't the whole answer to the transportation crisis, but regardless of what sort of revenue package is eventually adopted, efficiencies and streamlined permit processes will help us spend our tax dollars more wisely.

KEEPING THE HOME FRONT SECURE

One of the first acts of the new Democratic majority in the House last November was the creation of a new House Select Committee on Community Security, which is charged with overseeing the state's anti-terrorism efforts. The committee will be responsible for performing an inventory of the state's capacity to avert and respond to terrorist attacks, examining the preparedness of state and local law enforcement agencies, emergency response teams, and public health departments. Among its many tasks, the committee will:

- Review the safety of major transportation networks, energy facilities, state buildings and public venues, and water and food production facilities;
- Ensure the state's ability to prevent or handle a possible bioterrorism attack;
- Consider changes to the state's criminal code designed to enhance the state's ability to fight terrorism; and
- Support citizens who are called up to active military duty.

We may never have to deal with attacks from within our own borders here in Washington. Certainly that's the hope we all share. But the September 11 attacks on America showed us clearly that we had better be ready to prevent or respond to any contingency. That's where this new, bipartisan committee will focus its attention.

DOING THE SMART THING FOR K-12 SCHOOLS

It's right there in the state constitution: Taking care of education is "the paramount duty" of the Legislature. This year, our schools, like every other state program, will be looking at a smaller revenue pie. That's no excuse for ducking our paramount duty. I'm looking at low-cost, high-impact goals, including ways to make schools safer for our children, and to increase parental and community involvement in our public schools. We'll continue this session to work on accountability measures to get the most from our education dollar. And if we did nothing else, I'd say this session would be a good one for our kids and our communities and our schools if we could finally scrap the supermajority requirement for school levies.

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